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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the ideas of Conrad Fiedler, a 19th century German philosopher of art, concerning art criticism, or the judging of works of visual art. In addition to a brief biography of Conrad Fiedler, the paper's main subject is Fiedler's ideas on art criticism as expressed in his book "On Judging Works of Visual Art" (1876, translated 1948). The paper also includes translation of some of Fiedler's aphorisms and statements from his other writings. Fiedler rejected the idea that art is based on contemplation of beauty. He strongly disagreed with the Kantian idea that art was only an undeveloped, rudimentary step in the acquiring of cognition. He saw art as a mental process involving another kind of cognition rather than abstract, conceptual cognition. Unlike the art educators and aestheticians of his day, Fiedler saw artistic consciousness as an inherent endowment of the human mind, that shows its presence already in the behavior of children. Fiedler identified an entire domain of the human mind, an intuitive domain consisting of artistic thinking, artistic cognition, and artistic configuration. These are holistic in their nature, being inherent endowments of gestalt, unifying lawfulness of the human mind. In accordance with Fiedler's views, using the term "aesthetics" without defining it, or treating it as an equal with art, or failing to realize the subjectivity of its criteria for art criticism may confuse and mislead art students. (DK)

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ART CRITICISM: THE POTENTIAL OF CONRAD FIEDLER'S IDEAS FOR ART EDUCATION

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ART CRITICISM: THE POTENTIAL OF CONRAD FIEDLER'S IDEAS

FOR ART EDUCATION

Conrad Fiedler, whose ideas are still little known in the fields of visual art and art education, was a philosopher of art who lived in the 1880's in the Munich area of Germany. As a close friend of Hans von Marées, the painter, and Adolph Hildebrand, the sculptor, Fiedler developed a keen interest in the process of artistic consciousness and its associated artistic activity. He published his ideas on visual art in several small books, most of which have not been translated into the English language. However, one of his books, Über die Beurteilung von Werken der Bildenden Kunst, was translated by Henry Schaefer-Simmern, and Fulmer Mood, and bears the English title: On Judging Works of Visual Art. (Fiedler, 1876; trans. 1948)

The subject of this paper deals with Fiedler's ideas on art criticism, or judging of works of visual art. Therefore, a good deal of material will be taken from the above mentioned translation, since the book in consideration was Fiedler's main work on the subject of art criticism. However, references will be made also to statements from Fiedler's other writings segments of which have been translated from German by this presenter. Fiedler's other publications were: Über Kunstinteressen und deren Förderung, 1879 (On Interests in Art and Their

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Promotion); Moderner Naturalismus und künstlerische Wahrheit, 1881 (Modern Naturalism and Artistic Truth); Über den Ursprung der künstlerischen Tätigkeit, 1887 (On the Origin of Artistic Activity); and Hans von Marées, seinem Andenken gewidmet, 1989 (Hans von Marées: A Tribute to His Memory). (Fiedler, trans., Schaefer-Simmern, Mood, 1948, p. xvi) The German texts for all of the above listed published writings of Fiedler can be found in a two volume publication, Fiedler: Schriften über Kunst, I & II (ed. Hermann Konnerth, 1913). Included also in volume II of this publication are aphorisms (1 - 228).

In addition to a brief biography of Conrad Fiedler, this paper contains the main subject of his ideas on art criticism, and follows with translations of some of his aphorisms and statements from certain of his other writings, along with this writer's comments.

CONRAD FIEDLER (1841 - 1895)

Conrad Fiedler was born on September 23, 1841, in Öderan, Saxony. In 1848, the family moved to Leipzig. Fiedler studied at the famous Fürstenschule in Meissen, and then went on to study law at Heidelberg, Berlin, and Leipzig. His advanced studies earned him the doctoral degree in law. Then he traveled, as so many young German professionals have done, to see other countries. He visited Paris, London, Italy, Greece, Spain, Egypt, Syria, and Palestine. In the winter of 1866-1867, he met the painter, Hans von Marées, in Rome. Marées was then thirty years old and was establishing a basis for his artistic career. This new friendship caused Fiedler to make art his main concern and to learn all he

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could about artistic consciousness and the artistic process. Fiedler and Marées remained close friends, and in 1874, they established living quarters along with the sculptor, Adolph Hildebrand, in the old cloister of San Francesco di Paolo, in the outskirts of Florence, Italy. His permanent home, however, was Munich, Germany. (Fiedler, trans. Schaefer-Simmern, Mood, 1948, pp. v - vi) Later, he also became a friend of Feuerbach, Böcklin, and Thoma.

According to Schaefer-Simmern, the philosophy of Conrad Fiedler was almost completely detached from the ideas of 19th century philosophers and aestheticians. He rejected, for example, the idea that art is based on contemplation of beauty. Also, he strongly disagreed with the Kantian idea that art was only an undeveloped, rudimentary step in the acquiring of cognition. He saw art as a mental process involving another kind of cognition than abstract, conceptual cognition. It was through direct contact with works of art that Fiedler gained this keen insight. (Fiedler, trans. Schaefer-Simmern, Mood, 1948, pp. vi-vii)

Of the three, Fiedler, Marées, and Hildebrand, only Fiedler went into the philosophy of art in any depth. Marées died in 1887 before he could publish his ideas, although Schaefer-Simmern indicated that one of the students of Marées, Karl von Pidoll, presented insights into Marées' thoughts in a book, Aus der Werkstatt eines Künstler, (Out of the Workshop of an Artist). Hildebrand published Problem der Form in 1893, and the noted art historian, Wölfflin stated that without knowing of the ideas of Fiedler, Hildebrand may very well have not been able to write his book. Letters between Fiedler and Marées show the high ethical

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convictions of the three friends in regard to artistic activity and also their beliefs of clear moral values necessary for genuine artistic creation. Fiedler's main endeavor was "nothing else than the search for the true origin of the artistic consciousness as it is artistically manifested in works of art." (Fiedler, trans. Schaefer-Simmern, Mood, 1948, pp. vi-ix)

Schaefer-Simmern indicated clearly in his introduction to Fiedler's book, On Judging Works of Visual Art, "In short, besides the scientific, conceptual comprehension there exists the perceptual, the artistic, cognition of the world....Fiedler establishes the sovereignty of the visual arts and thereby becomes the founder of a real theory and a pure science of art." (Fiedler, trans. Schaefer-Simmern, Mood, 1948, p. x) In 1876, Fiedler stated these insights about the essential substance of works of art and of artistic cognition in the above mentioned book.

No publisher of the 1876 publication was given by Schaefer-Simmern. The two volume publication of Fiedler's writings, edited by Hermann Konnerth, entitled, Konrad Fiedlers Schriften über Kunst, was published in 1913 (v.I) and 1914 (v.II). The writing, Über die Beurteilung von Werken der bildenden Kunst, (later translated as On Judging Works of Visual Art) was published in German by Weltgeist - Bücher, Verlags - Gesellschaft M.B.H., Berlin, with no date indicated. However, the editor, Klaus Leopold, referred to Konnerth's volumes in the Nachwort (epilogue). Therefore, this edition (Weltgeist - Bücher) had to have been published after 1914.

In regard to art education, Schaefer-Simmern stated, about Fiedler, "Fiedler's pedagogical aim was the harmonious cultivation of man's

mental powers. It was therefore natural that he should speculate upon the place of art activities in general education and see its pedagogical significance more clearly than anyone else." (Fiedler, trans. Schaefer-Simmern, Mood, 1948, p. xiii) Fiedler pointed out that the perceptual abilities of children should not be forced into learning how to draw this or that object, which leads to the blocking of the development of their own visual, holistic conceptions. Moreover, teaching them adult prescribed rules and facts about art that are not related to their own levels of development and conceptions of art, also stifle or block their artistic cognitions. Schaefer-Simmern expressed Fiedler's clear view, "Through the cultivation of the child's own clear visual conception, pictorially realized, he should acquire a clear mental picture that warrants a real, concrete understanding of his problems--which, in the end, supply him new concepts." (1948, p. xiv) Schaefer-Simmern added, "It is obvious that we are still far removed from such educational procedures." (1948, p. xiv)

Unlike the art educators and aestheticians of his day, Fiedler saw that artistic consciousness is an inherent endowment to the human mind and shows its presence already in the behavior of children. Thus, Schaefer-Simmern observed that nothing could be more in attunement with Fiedler's ideas of art education than the encouragement of children's own, inherent artistic consciousness and its pictorial realization. (1948, p. xv) Later, Gustaf Britsch (1879-1924), Egon Kornmann, Hans Herrmann, and other disciples of Britsch (including Schaefer-Simmern) developed a theory of visual art that was founded by Britsch, and based

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on the ideas of Fiedler. The "Britsch Theory", a theory of artistic consciousness, was applied to art education and to art history.

In regard to Fiedler's use of German, Schaefer-Simmern noted at the end of his introduction to On Judging Works of Visual Art, that often, the sentences of Fiedler were very long and had to be made into several sentences in the English translation. This writer found that to be true and he was forced to do the same in regard to certain translations included later in this paper.

It should be noted here that Sir Herbert Read, the well known late art historian, educator, and writer, referred to Conrad Fiedler in several of the former's publications, Icon and Idea (1955), and The Forms of Things Unknown (1960). In the Preface to Icon and Idea (The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard University, 1955), Read stated, "I do not claim to be the originator of the theory now presented. As I make clear in the first chapter, the germ of it is latent in the neglected works of Conrad Fiedler...." (Read, 1955, p. 5) In this same book, Read quoted Fiedler and added, "His fragmentary writings express, in my opinion, a profound understanding of the nature of art." (1955, p. 17)

In The Forms of Things Unknown, Read quoted Fiedler numerous times in the first chapters in support of the former's argument against a scientific philosopher's unfair and erroneous statements that art was an "emotive" field and that artists were "emotional" people. Fiedler believed that artists engage in a form of artistic thinking and artistic cognition in their work--a form of cognition different from, but just as valid as abstract, conceptual cognition. Read wrote in this second

publication (1960), "We can then more confidently affirm, with Conrad Fiedler, that 'artistic activity is an entirely original and absolutely independent mental activity'." (Read, 1960, p. 39)[1]

Hans Roosen referred to Fiedler's ideas in his article, Argumente für die Theorie der Bildenden Kunst von Britsch-Kornmann, "Fiedler asked about the source of artistic activity....it lies there 'where the human being [is] found face to face with the world--its visible appearance [seen] as an unending puzzle, which he grasps with all the strength of his mind and [which] unfolds [as] formed existence'" (Bild und Werk, May 1965, p. 121)[2] Fiedler was stating here that the visual complexity and apparent chaos of one's environment are transformed, via perceptual experience, and according to artistic, gestalt (holistic) form consciousness, into unified artistic conceptions in the mind, and in artworks.

FIEDLER'S IDEAS ON ART CRITICISM

Since the only translated publication of Fiedler's, On Judging Works of Visual Art (Fiedler, trans. Schaefer-Simmern, Mood, 1949), is organized with a number of sections dealing with how not to criticize a work of visual art, before Fiedler presented his view on how to judge or criticize such works, this paper will follow the same format. Since few art educators have heard of Conrad Fiedler, or have read any of his writings, quotations will be included throughout, along with this writer's comments. Words in brackets have been inserted in places by this

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writer for clarity in certain of the translations done by Schaefer-Simmern, and Mood, from the above book, and in this writer's own translations from other sources. Headings are this writer's formulations.

The Problem of Subjectivity

Fiedler began by stating that people usually criticize a work of art subjectively, and the more wide spread the audience of viewers, the less understanding occurs. He wrote "Commonly, one regards a work of art subjectively, instead of trying to understand it in accordance with the purpose of its originator, [and] one usually thinks he has done it complete justice by judging it after his own opinion." (Fiedler, 1949, pp. 2-3) People who are not educated in art criticism judge from the standpoint of their own likes and dislikes, often missing perceptions of the art works due to preconditioned attitudes or prejudices. Since emotions and conceptual thinking can block clear, objective perceptions, these people may actually miss seeing the artwork and as a consequence, they may arrive at hasty, unfair, and inaccurate conclusions.

Aesthetics Misses the Mark

Fiedler did not believe that aesthetics could lead one to a sound, objective criticism of a work of visual art. He stated, "It is obvious that the aesthetic sensation which makes us aware of definite qualities of natural objects is also active with regard to works of art." (1949, p. 5) This point he granted. One can have an aesthetic sensation (emotional reaction to a sensory experience) while viewing the rosy tints of a sunset, as well as while seeing such tints is a painting by Turner, for example. We have all had such experiences. He wrote, "Who has not

yet owed much pleasures to art and who does not count such hours among the most beautiful of his life?" (1949, p. 6) Certainly, it should be stated that "aesthetics" is defined here as "the philosophy of the beautiful" and an "aesthetic experience" is defined as an experience of beauty while viewing something in nature and/or in visual art works. It is in this sense that Fiedler used the term, aesthetics, and not in the ancient Greek sense of "perception".

Yes, Fiedler agreed that we have had such lovely experiences, but that is not sufficient for judging works of visual art. He added, "But are we entitled through such pleasures to believe that we have caught hold of the essential, the really artistic substance of works of art?" (1949, p. 6) He continued. "But how can the objects of nature have an artistic substance if the essence of artistic substance owes its origin to the spiritual power of man? We must, then, seek the artistic substance in other qualities of works of art, and although aesthetic sensation is indisputably one of the important aspects of works of art, we have not yet got hold of their innermost core." (1949, pp. 6-7) Using the example given earlier, just because we have experienced a sense of beauty (an aesthetic sensation) while seeing rosy tints in a sunset and in a painting by Turner, does not mean we have seen and judged the essence or "core" of the painting by Turner. We have seen visual elements in non-art (the sunset, etc.) as well as in art, and therefore cannot assume that we have seen the art work, a human product, in its intrinsic, essential aspects.

Fiedler added, "The same work of art may arouse any degree of dissatisfaction or pleasure, from disgust to highest admiration, not only in

different persons but even in the same observer." (1949, p. 7) In other words, the all too common subjective tastes (likes and dislikes) of many who view art works are not stable, but can change perhaps according to some factors having little or nothing to do with the art work. Thus stated Fiedler, "One can only refer to the fact that he who wishes to arrive at a sound judgment about works of art must from the beginning repress his aesthetic sensations, and he must, on the contrary, acquire in a particular way a capacity for a sure judgment." (1949, pp. 7-8)

Fiedler pointed out that the term "aesthetics" is rather ambiguous although he used it in a limited sense (as defined earlier in this paper).

It is an assumption on the part of certain people that art belongs to the field of aesthetics and aesthetic research. Those who make such an assumption fail to see or to realize that only a peripheral aspect of art relates to aesthetics.

Fiedler wrote on this:

> But if we become aware that from the standpoint of aesthetics we can get hold of but a part of the full significance of works of art, if we see that artistic activity offers phenomena which resist classification from aesthetic points of view, if we see that the application of aesthetic principles leads to positive judgments about works of art which lack all powers to convince with regard to the works themselves, and finally, if we see that, as a consequence of all this, aesthetical science has often to put checks upon itself in order to be able to do justice to art, or that it forces despotically restraining fetters upon art, we may then indeed be induced to submit to critical investigation the assumption that in their innermost essence aesthetics and art are internally united."
>
> (1949, pp. 8-9)

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It is obvious that Fiedler did not accept the assumption that aesthetics and art, in their "innermost essence" were so united. His statement above is an eloquent one on behalf of visual art and artistic activity, and against confused assumptions that existed in his day, and which exist today in regard to aesthetics and art. It can be said from his standpoint, and perhaps from the standpoint of all artists and art educators, that aesthetics does not equal art.

Subject Contents

Fiedler felt that even though subject contents of a work of art are closely related to the artistic intention, they need to be separated. He stated, "Paradoxical as it may sound...interest in art begins only at the moment when interest in literary content vanishes." (Fiedler, 1949, pp. 10-11) Undue interest in subject (or literary) contents can cause one to become blind to the facts of the artistic structure, the organization of lines, colors, spaces, and so on. Fiedler added, "The judgment of a work of art solely by its subject matter can only lead to erroneous results." (1949, p. 11) Therefore, in order to see and to criticize a work of visual art, one must try to put the subject contents to one side or to see them, if it be the case, as an integral whole with the artistic form (the unified structure).

On Connoisseurship and Art History

Fiedler believed that concerns about anthropological, cultural, sociological, or historical associations of a work of art, as with concern for aesthetics, and subject contents, do not lead to objective art criticism. He wrote, "On the other hand, these studies, no matter how serious or how broad-visioned they may be, can only be tied to a scientific

interest, not to an artistic one....There is much that is worth knowing about works of art which has no relation to their artistic value." (1949 pp. 13-14) Such concerns of art historians for the life of artists, the times in which they lived, and even the history of tools and materials, do not focus on the essence of a work of art, but rather shine lights on only the outer edges of it.

Fiedler believed that such historical interest can completely miss the mark of enabling a person to see clearly and to criticize fairly and objectively works of art. He stated, "Here lies the danger of this historical interest. It creates a certain barrier against pure artistic interest....Thus it happens that not rarely the most widely different aspects of works of art are simultaneously submitted to historical considerations without respect to their artistic importance or nonimportance." (Fiedler, 1949, pp. 16-18) This writer recalls a former student of Henry Schaefer-Simmern's who went on to study art history. The student wrote to the latter that he had been able (with Schaefer-Simmern's guidance) to see and to judge artistic forms, but with all of the historical material he now had to learn, he was losing his ability to see and to make gestalt (holistic) art criticisms. In other words, the many historical concerns tended to dull his perceptions and to distract his mind from artistic facts before his eyes.

Fiedler felt that anyone trying to understand art as an aspect of a society or culture needs to study the impact of art on the individual observer. He stated in regard to this, "However, we notice frequently that man, before adopting the artistic point of view, considers art and

regards its influences upon human nature from many other points of view, whether religious, moral, political, or other. Works of art are not then comprehended artistically." (Fiedler, 1949, pp. 22-23)

Philosophy and Art

On the subject of art criticism and philosophy, Fiedler wrote, "Finally, we have to be clear on this point: whether the philosophical understanding of art is a true understanding of art or not." (Fiedler, 1949, p. 24) He added, "If a philosophical insight into the relationship between art and the whole concept of the world and art is added to the correct understanding of art, there results a progress in philosophical knowledge, but not in artistic knowledge." (1949, pp. 24-25) He wanted to make it clear that art can only be criticized and understood in its own terms. To that end he stated, "I shall try to point out that a real understanding of a work of art is only possible if it is grounded upon an artistic understanding of the world." (1949, p. 25)

In a rather poetic manner, Fiedler ended his discussion of missing the mark of artistic understanding via philosophy when he wrote, "Man believes himself capable of finding in philosophical knowledge the highest peak of all possible knowledge, but he forgets that the peak upon which he climbs conceals from our view the other summits." (Fiedler, 1949, p. 26

Feelings and Artistic Form

In a statement of strong conviction, Fiedler emphasized, "The understanding of art can be grasped in no other way than in terms of art." (Fiedler, 1949, p. 27) In regard to our feelings associated with art,

Fiedler elaborated on that direct theme:

> The strength of sensation [feelings aroused by perceptions] depends on the susceptibility of our feelings and not on the amount of our perceptual experiences. Indeed, if we watch ourselves closely we shall find [that] our sensation does not stimulate and further, but rather hinders, the growth of our visual conceptions.[3]
>
> (1949, p. 29)

Fiedler was referring to the interference caused by feelings or emotions upon perceptions and upon the transformation of those perceptions into artistic formations (conceptions). When he wrote of the interferences of aesthetics, art history, and philosophy with sound art criticisms, he was thinking apparently of non-artistic people of such fields making judgments about art works. Yet, in the above block quotation, readers will see that he referred to each person's own visual (artistic) conceptions and how feelings can hinder same. So here he was stating that we can experience the obscuring of clear perceptions of our own created art works by our feelings. So we have individual or personal interferences and social or cultural interferences, the latter imposed on our art and the art of others by professionals and others who apply non-art "yardsticks" in order to measure the value of art works.

Fiedler believed that refined feelings which are associated with the viewing of art works showed no sign of artistic talent. He wrote, "To possess such feelings is the main prerequisite for artistic as well as for every other mental productiveness....But the artist becomes an artist by virtue of his ability to rise above his sensations." (Fiedler, 1949, p. 30

Abstract, Conceptual Cognition and Art

Fiedler addressed abstract thinking and abstract cognition in relation to art criticism. Such abstract thinking and cognition are especially present in scientific observations. Of this, Fiedler noted, "The more they [scientific observers] advance in transforming perception into abstract concepts, the more incapable they become of remaining, even for a short while, at the stage of perception." (Fiedler, 1949, p. 33) He emphasized that to remain at the doorway of perception instead of going on to the stage of abstraction should not be taken to mean that one does not experience cognition. He stated, "on the contrary, it means to keep open other roads that also arrive at cognition." (1949, p. 35)

This writer has seen many times how art students draw what they know conceptually, but do not see the visual facts of what they have created. An example would be an extremely foreshortened arm or leg which in fact is an outlined appendage "stuck on" in an isolated way to the body of a human figure drawing. They know by abstract concepts that there is more to the limb, but it is hidden from view. They do not see the distortion and crippling appearance of what is made visible in their work. Another example is a drawing of a front view of a human foot. In fact it looks like a "club foot" since no indication of a heel is shown, but students often do not see this and say, "Oh, you can't see the rest of the foot because it is on the other side, hidden from view!" When you turn their papers over to find it, they are very puzzled, indeed. This "shock" technique of teaching usually forces them into a completely different way of seeing--genuine seeing of visual facts of the artworks. Before,

they did not really see what was in front of them, but only mental assumptions and illusions.

Henry Schaefer-Simmern liked to quote Fiedler at times and the following quotation was one of the former's favorites: "But if cognition attained by perceptual experience is different from cognition reached by abstract thinking, it can nevertheless be a true and final cognition." (Fiedler, 1949, p. 35) The quotation speaks for itself.

In a statement that sums up his beliefs about both feelings (sensations) and abstraction, Fiedler wrote, "Only he who is able to hold onto his perceptual experiences in spite of both sensation and abstraction proves his artistic calling." (Fiedler, 1949, p. 37)

Education and Art

In regard to education, Fiedler wrote:

> The demand that more attention be paid to perception in man's education would only be justified if it were understood that, for man, perception is something of independent importance apart from all abstraction and that the capacity for concrete perceiving has as strong a claim to be developed by regular and conscious use as the capacity for abstract thinking has.
> (Fiedler, 1949, p. 40)

Of course, Fiedler believed such perceptual education was indeed necessary. To Fiedler, one could achieve cognition of the visible environment by perception and visual, artistic conceiving, just as well as by abstract thinking and concept development. He stated in this regard, "It should be understood that man can attain the mental mastery of the world not only by the creation of concepts but also by the creation of visual conceptions." (1949, p. 40)

Imitation and Art

In strong terms, Fiedler attacked those who would imitate either the

art of others or objects from nature from a single camera like viewpoint. He wrote, "He [the person who copies, imitates, or reproduces] is on the way to encroaching upon nature's creative work--a childish, senseless enterprise, which often takes on the appearance of a certain ingenious boldness, usually based on absence of thought." (Fiedler, 1949, p. 44)

Imitation and Intuition

Fiedler continued his comments on imitation: "Artistic activity is neither slavish imitation nor arbitrary feeling; rather, it is free creative configuration." (Fiedler, 1949, p. 46) He referred here and there to intuition, which according to Webster's dictionary, means "understanding based on immediate sensory perception." Indeed, his idea, and those of Britsch, Kornmann, and Schaefer-Simmern, in regard to the mental process of artistic, visual conceiving fit closely to that definition of intuition. Fiedler stated, "Through intuition one enters into a higher sphere of mental existence, thus perceiving the visible existence of things which in their endless profusion and their vacillating confusion man had taken for granted as simple and clear." (1949, pp. 47-48) Through intuition, one comprehends that seeming confusion as a complex order as perceptions of it are transformed into holistic forms of visual art. Schaefer-Simmern was very fond of the following words of Fiedler on this subject. Fiedler stated, "Art does not start from abstract thought in order to arrive at forms; rather, it climbs up from the formless to the formed, and in this process is found its entire mental meaning." (1949, p. 49)

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Children and Art

Fiedler wrote of children and art in a way that showed his keen interest in art education. He wrote, " The child acquires a consciousness of the world and, even before he knows anything about it, before he can denote what it is [means] by the expression 'world', possesses the world." (Fiedler, 1949, p. 49) Subconsciously, the child gains through his artistic activity a visual conception and artistic cognition of the world around him (or her), even before learning from others about that world, or before being able to even read the word, 'world'. In this regard, he added, "Only through artistic activity does man comprehend the visible world...." (1949, p. 54)

Fiedler brings out an interesting point that artistic activity cannot fully express what the artist, child or adult, has realized in the mind. Something is always left unexpressed. This, of course, is a very "soft" subject and we cannot work with it, but from a philosophical and perhaps poetic standpoint, it is worthy of some contemplation.

On Technical Skill

Fiedler thought that technical skill should not be emphasized as a thing in itself. He wrote, "Technical skill as such has no independent rights in the artistic process; it serves solely the mental process." (Fiedler, 1949, p. 56) In other words, it is the means of expression.

Artistic Imagination and Artistic Cognition

He wrote in positive terms about artistic imagination: "Through the power of artistic imagination [a] visual conception of the world grows ever richer in configurative forms." (1949, p. 57) By "configurative

forms' he meant unified, gestalt[4] formations, by the way. He wrote of a real mastery by the artist over things. "The more appearances are subjected to the power of his [the artist's] artistic cognition, the more their qualities lose their power over him." (1949, 57)

Realism and Idealism

Fiedler believed that neither realism nor idealism should concern the artist. He stated, "Art, if it deserves the name, cannot be either realistic or idealistic." (Fiedler, 1949, p. 59) Then he added a sort of paradoxical statement about this. "Art is always realistic, because it tries to create for men [human beings] that which is foremost their reality. Art is always idealistic, because all reality that art creates is a product of the mind." (1949, p. 60) He elaborated on this. "Artistic activity is an entirely original and absolutely independent mental activity." (1949, p. 61)

Individual Consciousness of Artists

Once again, Fiedler referred to an intangible aspect of art that cannot be totally expressed. He wrote, "This consciousness itself in its totality is incapable of expressing itself in its totality and has no duration." (Fiedler, 1949, p. 64) It is in this sense of the intangible aspect of an art work--its mental and intuitive conception--that Fiedler stated, "Man's works follow him to the grave. And furthermore, during their existence, works of art are but shadows of that which they were while they were still related to the living creative activity of the artist." (Fiedler, 1949, p.65) Obviously, this aspect of an art work cannot help us to engage in art criticism. It is like "conceptual art" that nobody but the artist can see since it is in his or her own mind.

Art Criticism

While the entire book of Fiedler's, On Judging Works of Visual Art, is on art criticism, some precise statements are quoted in this paper under the art criticism subheading. Fiedler stated in this regard, "he [who criticizes works of art] recognizes on the one hand, that artistic ability can become victimized by many aberrations...on the other hand, ...he who judges will see that art which exists at all does not require the appreciation of being said to be good." (Fiedler, 1949, pp. 72-73) He added, "the conclusion must be drawn that in judging works of art one must strictly refrain from forming a fixed code of laws to which one can submit artistic phenomena from the beginning on. Always, understanding can follow achievements of the artist, it can never precede them." (1949, p. 73) Finally, Fiedler made a strong criticism of certain art critics. "It is intolerable in the field of art criticism to meet with the presumptuousness of all those who made themselves guilty by assuming the mien of the master toward those from whom they differ...." (1949, pp. 73-74) Fiedler was warning against those critics who would impose their predetermined criteria while judging art works. They did, and do not exercise objective, fair art criticisms, but instead, think that they have "cornered the market on truth" about what is good art and what is bad art, and so on. They labor under a delusion.

Artistic Cognition

Fiedler concluded On Judging Works of Visual Art with statements on what he called artistic cognition. He wrote, "The artistic impulse is an impulse of cognition, an operation of the power of achieving cognition; the artistic result, a sequel of cognition." (Fiedler, 1949, p.76)

p. 76) Also, "The artist does nothing else than achieve in his own universe the work of logical creative configuration; herein lies the essence of every cognition." (1949, p. 76) He meant that artistic cognition, while not abstract, conceptual cognition, but rather a more intuitive comprehension taking place in a perceptual and artistic domain of the mind, still has a logical nature. Thus it deserves to be recognized as a bona fide form of human cognition. The art work is the expression of that "intuitive logic" which is manifest in the unified, holistic structure of the artistic form.

To practice art criticism as Fiedler meant it should be, is to go beyond aesthetics, art history, subject contents, feelings, abstract thinking and cognition, in order to remain on the threshold of artistic perception. It means to see and to judge art works in a holistic and objective way so as to identify the existence, or lack of existence of a unified artistic form. Therefore, Fiedler would not object to the teaching of art criticism in the schools <u>if</u> it was of this kind. Of course that if a big <u>IF</u>. He would probably object to art history being taught <u>unless</u> it is an art history of artistic, gestalt forms and their stages from the simplest to the most complex in various times and cultures. Since aesthetics deals with mainly fringe aspects of art, and its concerns for beauty and taste are often confused with artistic values, Fiedler would be inclined, this writer suspects, to say, "Keep it out of the art classroom." Art can stand on its own merits and has its own essential qualities. Therefore, students should be guided to apply an art criticism which permits them to focus on those qualities.

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Translated Material

The following are this writer's translations of quotations from some of Fiedler's aphorisms and other writings. Brackets contain the translator's words inserted to help the flow of the quotation. Most quotations are taken from Schriften über Kunst, Volume II, edited by Hermann Konnerth (1914) This writer's comments follow each quotation.

Aphorism 1. "There is the evaluation of artistic merit of the artwork in relation to various biases. There is a moral bias, a historical bias, a philosophic bias, and so on. However, the aesthetic standpoint is also a bias." (Fiedler, ed. Konnerth, 1914, V. II, p. 3) Again, Fiedler was stating that to look at and to criticize a work of visual art form non-art standpoints such as the moral, the historical, or the aesthetic (etc.) is to be biased and subjective. Thus one does not really see what is the reality in "front of one's nose", but a kind of projection from one's own mind and emotions.

Aphorism 3. "Aesthetics is not art instruction. Aesthetics has to do with the investigation of a certain kind of emotion. Art speaks in [its] first line to cognition, and second to feelings [emotions]. It is false throughout to accept [the idea] that art has only to do with the emotional life of desire and non-desire, and [therefore] falls in the domain of aesthetics." (Fiedler, ed. Konnerth, 1914, V. II, p. 4) Not only does this statement put aesthetics in its place, along with those who champion aesthetics as the way of explaining art, but it expresses what Herbert Read expressed in his book, The Forms of Things Unknown, namely that art is not merely emotive experience and artists are not all emotional people.

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Earlier in this paper, reference was made to this book and the numerous quotations that Read included from Fiedler's writings.

Aphorism 9. "The aesthetic judgment [as to] whether something is beautiful or ugly, whether something pleases or displeases, etc., leaves (after Kant) no valid universal standards to subjugate; it is purely subjective, and in each individual instance must the judgment of taste be newly given." (Fiedler, ed. Konnerth, 1914, v.II, p. 9) Instead of dealing with objective art criticism, the aesthetician deals with subjective likes and dislikes, or taste.

Aphorism 220. "It is important to sift out of the combination of actions, the purely artistic, which alone is imperishable and which also will be perceived as the origin of the artwork, [in order] to possess the true, essential comprehension of art." (Fiedler, ed. Konnerth, 1914, V. II, p. 142) As Fiedler stated in On Judging Works of Visual Art, one can become distracted by aesthetic concerns, historical matters, techniques, skill in uses of tools and materials, subject contents, and so on, and not see objectively a work of art's essential reality--its form. That form consists of relationships of the basic art elements and their organization in pictorial space, plus, in many cases except perhaps abstract non-representationalism, the transformed visual conception born in the mind from inherent abilities but "fed" by perceptual experiences.

Aphorism 222. "The actions of art are a particular subject of investigation, [but] knowledge of them [the actions] does not explain the reality of art. They can only give indications of the perception of the origin of art in human nature." (Fiedler, ed. Konnerth, 1914, V. II, p. 143) These actions point out certain peripheral aspects of art, but miss the "center of the target", art itself.

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SUMMARY

Those who advocate discipline based art education today have as one of their four key components, aesthetics. It was included in DBAE even though they had not tested its application to art education in the schools. They, and others who use the term "aesthetics" without defining it, or who treat it as an equal with art, or who fail to realize the subjectivity of its criteria for art criticism may be adding to the confusion and may be misleading students of art, if this writer comprehends Fiedler's ideas correctly. Fiedler had (and has) a strong case. And it is not only the aesthetic component, but the art history and the art criticism components of discipline-based art education that need to be seen for what they are--only ways of understanding the outer reaches, the outer "shell" of art, but not its essence. If teachers think that by teaching children art history, steps in art criticism based on historic or subject content or technical concerns (etc.), and aesthetics, they are teaching them about art, they may be very mistaken.

Fiedler, in his little known, and fragmented writings, shined an important light on visual art and art criticism. He identified an entire domain of the human mind, an intuitive domain consisting of artistic thinking, artistic cognition, and artistic configuration. These are holistic in their nature, being inherent endowments of gestalt, unifying lawfulness of the human mind. The ideas of Gustaf Britsch, Egon Kornmann, Hans Herrmann, Henry Schaefer-Simmern, and Rudolf Arnheim are based on his insights. Having died tragically before he could compile his ideas into a major work, Fiedler is only now slowly becoming known

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for his illuminating ideas on art for artists, for art teachers, and for art students. E. Betzler wrote in his book, Neue Kunstererziehung (New Art Education): "Fiedler, in his ingenious [book] On Judging Works of Visual Art, demonstrated in [a] forceful, convincing examination, that the problem of [artistic] form [can be] centrally grasped neither from aesthetics, from art and cultural histories, or from philosophy; that art can be found [in] no other way than [from] out of its own [self]." (Betzler, 1949, p. 17) Matthias Kohn wrote, in his article, Krise der Kunstpädagogik?, "K. Fiedler had attempted in different theoretical beginnings to grasp 'pictorial thinking' as specific artistic thought. The meaning of his writings is indeed not estimated highly enough [by] us [with] our today's art comprehension." (Betzler, 1970, p. 97)

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NOTES

1. Read's quotation from Conrad Fiedler's book, On judging works of visual art, is located on p. 61 of that book (first edition of the translation, 1949).
2. This quotation has been translated from the German by this writer. The Roosen's source for this quotation is listed in Bild und Werk (Bildnerischen Erziehung), as C. Fiedler, Über die Beurteilung von Werken der bildenden Kunst, Ratingen 60, Abschn. III, 7. No publication date was given.
3. "Visual conception": an artistic image or configuration formed in the mind according to an inherent gestalt forming process.
4. "Gestalt formations": formations in which all of the parts are interfunctionally related to each other and to the whole. Moreover, the whole is more than a sum of the parts.

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